



Cambodian Classical and Folk Dance

1998 Commemorative Book



**Thomas A. Golden, Jr.
State Representative**

តំណាងរាស្ត្រ

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Best Wishes to the

*Greater Lowell Cambodian Community
and Congratulations to*

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The Angkor Dance Troupe!

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Khmer Folk Dance by Sam-Ang Sam & Chan Moly Sam, Khmer Studies Institute Inc., 1987
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The Classical Dance Company of Cambodia, Sam-Ang Sam, Music Director
"An Introduction to Khmer Traditional Dance" by Huy Serey Phousita, Seoul, 1995

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Angkor Dance Troupe, Inc.

History and Background

Like all traditional arts, Cambodian dance has been handed from one generation to the next. Since the great Angkor Era, Cambodian dancers have preserved, cherished, and celebrated their art.

The Angkor Dance Troupe was founded in Lowell, MA in 1986 by two teachers and a handful of dancers who learned traditional dance in refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. Between

1975 and 1979, when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia, more than 90% of the country's perished or fled. It was in the camps and later in places like Lowell and at the University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh that traditional Cambodian dance was painstakingly resurrected.

Today, dance has become one of the primary ways that Cambodians, split by politics and war, identify a common culture. For the people of Cambodia, art is the core of life, combining entertainment, tradition, religion, and social cohesion. Wherever Cambodians live, so do the traditions of practicing, performing, and passing on the culture.

Since the Angkor Era, Cambodian dancers have preserved, cherished, and celebrated their art.

A Leader in Traditional Cambodian Dance

The Angkor Dance Troupe is nationally recognized as one of the most accomplished and experienced Cambodian traditional arts ensembles performing today. The Troupe develops and teaches the traditions of Cambodian performing arts, promotes an understanding and appreciation of Cambodian culture, and provides a positive social, cultural, and recreational outlet for Cambodian youth.

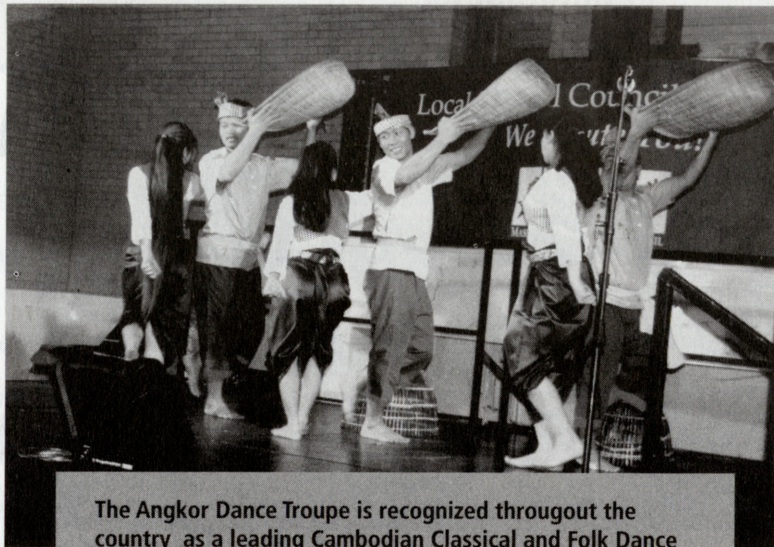
The Angkor Dance Troupe is routinely invited to perform at prestigious events such as Boston's First Night celebration and the Lowell Folk Festival. The Troupe has participated in workshops at Jacob's Pillow and is listed on the New England States Touring Roster



*Congratulations to Lowell's
nationally recognized Dance Troupe!*

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PAUL MARION
& ROSEMARY NOON



The Angkor Dance Troupe is recognized throughout the country as a leading Cambodian Classical and Folk Dance Ensemble. Above, members perform in a special ceremony at the Massachusetts State House in March 1998.

The Troupe's artistic director, **Phousita S. Huy**, is one of the most-respected master teachers of Cambodian dance in the U.S. and is recognized internationally. She is a recently-emigrated teacher and star performer from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, considered the world's artistic standard bearer for Cambodian performing arts. Troupe coordinator and cofounder **Tim Chan Thou** was trained and certified as a teacher of Cambodian traditional dance at the Khao-I-Dang and Philippine Refugee Centers.

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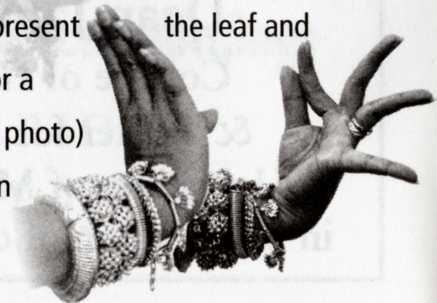


Classical Dance

Classical dance has been connected to the sacred rituals of Cambodia for more than one thousand years. During the great Angkor civilization, dancers performed ceremonies in temples to bring prosperity to the kingdom. Once the exclusive domain of royalty, classical dance is now performed for audiences everywhere.

In classical dance, we see highly-stylized positions in concert with gentle movements. Gestures are strictly defined and distinguished by the intricacy of hand positions.

Each of these gestures has a specific meaning, often relating to nature. For example "Lea" can denote a leaf, but it can also mean "to open." (See right hand in photo below.) Depending on its context within the dance, Lea can represent the leaf and its beauty or the opening of a hand or a piece of paper. "Cheep" (left hand in photo) can symbolize a flower or it can mean to fold into small pleats.



Throughout Cambodia, after the harvest, it is time for music, song, and dance. Folk dance is rooted in rural Cambodia and depicts rituals of everyday village life, such as fishing and rice farming, that are typically undervalued in the rush toward westernization.

Dance motifs are commonly based on local legends and inspired by themes of nature as well as the ceremonies and customs that shape the lives of Cambodian people. Distinctive, colorful costumes represent the traditional dress of peoples from the various regions and ethnic groups within Cambodia.

Just as court dance is ruled by a strict form and a prescribed language of movement, folk dance is spontaneous, created for emotional expressions.

Folk Dance



សេវា រ៉ែ

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Thank you Angkor Dance Troupe.

Marina and Peter Schell



Phousita S. Huy, Artistic Director for the Angkor Dance Troupe, is a recently-emigrated star performer from the University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Visiting Dance master Say Soeur (left) is one of the world's best teachers and performers of the "Monkey Dance" role. Here, he accompanies Troupe Artistic Director Phousita Huy in a performance of Hanuman and Sovann Macha (White Monkey & Golden Mermaid).



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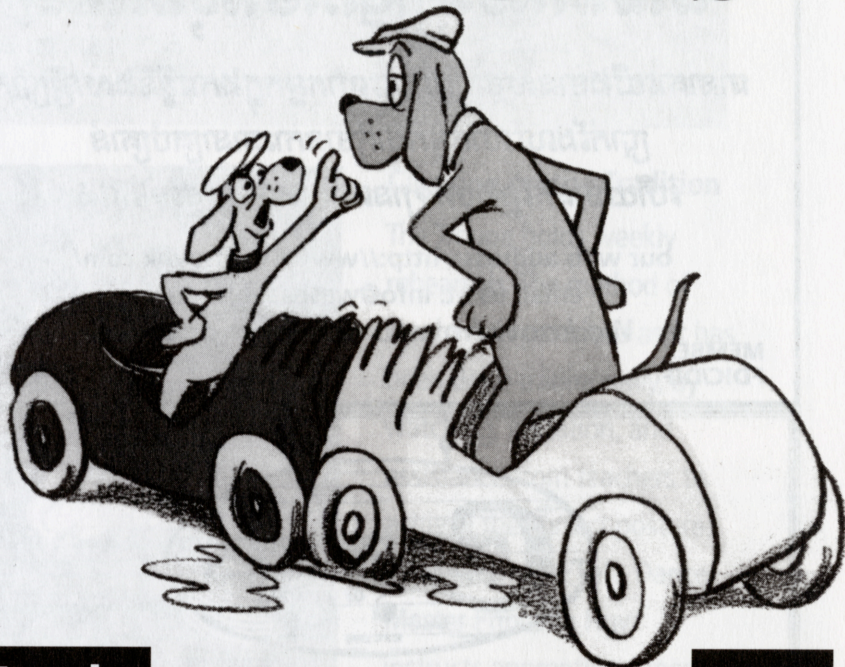
An Extensive Collection of Authentic Costumes

The Angkor Dance Troupe has assembled an extensive collection of richly-detailed, authentic costumes, dance materials, and artifacts. Much of the collection was created by master dancers and costumers from the University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh.



Preparing for a performance can take several hours. Many costumes are so intricate and close-fitting that dancers have to be sewn into them before performances.

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Carrying on the Tradition

The Troupe holds weekly rehearsals. The method of teaching is practiced as it has been done traditionally, by watching, imitation, and assistance from teachers to achieve the correct postures and movement. Left, Dance Master Phousita Huy instructs apprentice dancer Elizabeth Yim.



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Royal Univeristy of Fine Arts Dance Masters Sophea Sek, Yom Peng, and Say Soeur arrived in the United States in early 1998 and will teach and perform with the Angkor Dance Troupe throughout the year.

1998 Masters of Cambodian Dance Project

In 1998, the Angkor Dance Troupe hosted three internationally-recognized dance masters from Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The three will teach and perform with the Troupe as part of an apprenticeship program funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Community Folklife Program. Right, Ms. Yom Peng instructs apprentice Linda Thou during a Troupe rehearsal.



1998 Masters of Cambodian Dance Project

Esteemed Dance Master Yom Peng demonstrated the "Giant" classical dance role during a workshop at Middlesex Community College as part of 1998 Lowell Women's Week.

Below, Ms. Yom taught the traditional Roam Vong circle dance to students at the Lowell Demonstration School during a Cambodian New Year celebration.



*Best Wishes
to the
Angkor Dance
Troupe*

**Donald E. Pierson,
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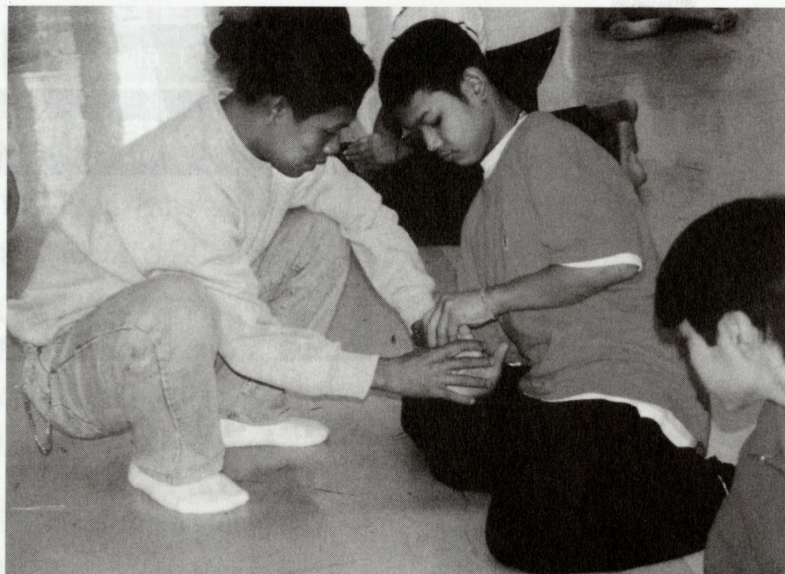
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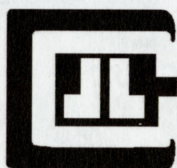
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1998 Masters of Cambodian Dance Project

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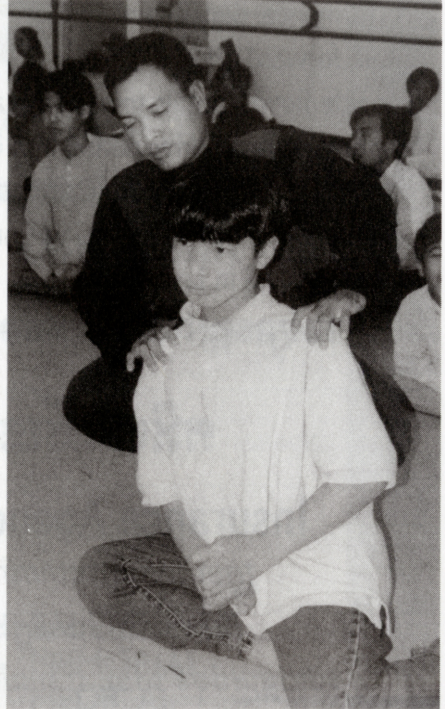
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Left, Dance Master Sophea Sek assists apprentice Tola Sok, 15, in perfecting a hand gesture during a Troupe rehearsal.

Right, Master Say Soeur with one of his proteges, 13-year old Samnang Hor. Mr. Say is a widely-respected teacher of the Monkey, a spirited and lively classical dance role that is hugely popular at performances. Samnang apprenticed under Say during a 1996 residency and now performs the role for audiences around New England.



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**extend sincere best wishes to
the Angkor Dance Troupe**

The Blessing Dance

The Blessing Dance was traditionally performed in the Cambodian royal palace to eliminate bad spirits and bless the royal kingdom. Today the blessing dance is performed at the beginning of performances of all types. It is a dance of greetings and good wishes. During the performance, dancers come forward and



sprinkle flower petals toward the audience. This is done in the hope of bringing prosperity, peace, and good health to everyone in attendance in accordance with Cambodian tradition. (Above, Troupe members perform the Blessing Dance at the 1997 Southeast Asian Water Festival in Lowell.)

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The Coconut Shell Dance

Coconut trees are a main agricultural resource in Cambodia. They provide sustenance to Khmer farmers and are abundant in villages. The dance was inspired by a popular game that used coconut shells. The game was played during all kinds of ceremonies, but most often during weddings, engagements, and when the groom was escorted in a procession to the bride's house. In its original form, it was a one-man show. In the modern-day dance, an equal number of male and female dancers performs the dance, signifying friendship and courtship.



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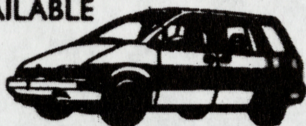
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After countless hours of practice, Angkor Dance Troupe apprentices Choumnith Sath, 11, and Samnang Hor, 13, mastered the skills to perform the challenging classical dance "Hanuman and Sovann Macha." Above the pair dazzled an audience in Cambridge during a performance in January 1998.

Hanuman and Sovann Macha

Hanuman & Sovann Macha (The White Monkey and the Golden Mermaid) depicts a scene from the *Reamker*, Cambodia's version of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Before this episode begins, the Queen was captured and taken to the kingdom of Lanka far out at sea. King Ream calls on a famous army general named Hanuman to help him rescue the queen. Hanuman is a white monkey and in Cambodian legend, white monkey warriors always fight evil. Hanuman sets about to build a bridge across the ocean to reach the Queen. But as fast as he and his army of monkeys pile up stones for the bridge, the stones mysteriously disappear.

In the scene depicted in this dance, the white monkey dives into the sea to investigate. What he discovers is that a school of fish, led by a golden mermaid named Sovann Macha, has been carrying off the stones. Hanuman confronts the beautiful troublesome mermaid — at the same time he can't help but be dazzled by her beauty and falls in love. And while she initially resists, Hanuman eventually wins her over as his partner in the fight against evil.

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The Battle at Night

Chambang Pel Yup, the Battle at Night, is a dance from the traditional Lakhon Khol form all-male dance drama, performed to illustrate stories from the *Reamker*. The Battle at Night depicts a scene in which monkeys, who always fight evil, fight a group of demons. As night falls, neither side can tell friend from foe and chaos ensues. Finally, the monkeys use the weapon of light to prevail over darkness. Cambodians see this episode as an allegory for the battle against ignorance. (From the Classical Dance Company of Cambodia 1990 Tour)

The Peacock of Pursat

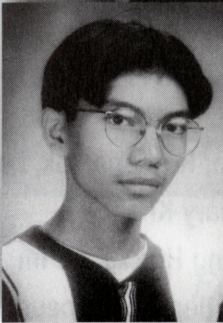
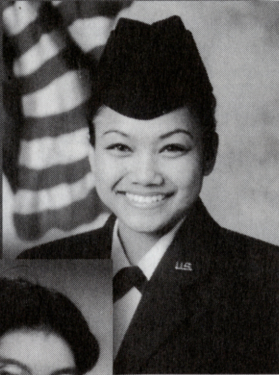
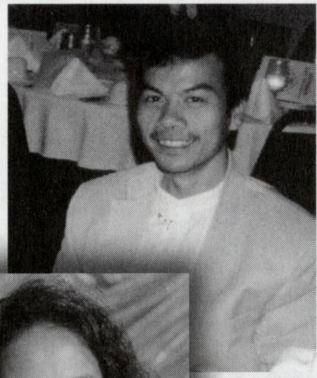
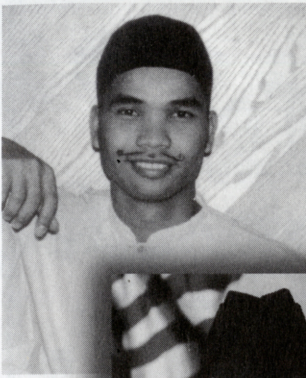
This dance originated in the Pursat province of Cambodia where people of the Cardamom Mountain region performed dances for the spirits before going on trips to pick cardamom (a spice from the ginger family). Cambodia's lush tropical forests are home to a large variety of animals and birds, including numerous peacocks and peahens. Their fabulous green and black tail feathers bear the stamp of nobility. During the Peacock of Pursat dance, performers wearing headgear of peacock feathers represent pairs of peafowl as they play in the forest and float on the mountain breezes.

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Akara Im 1997**

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dedicated students of Cambodian dance are awarded the
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**Congratulations and Best Wishes from
Ann Bartholomew & Ron Micheels**



The Angkor Dance Troupe at FirstNight Boston, 1997

From left: Chhan D. Touch, Khoeun Pring, Phalik Ting, George Chigas, Thida Loeung, Linda Thou, Sochenda Uch, Vanlina Im, Rothana Yok, Pov Sath, Boo Ouch, Rotana Thou, Vanrotha Im, Sophannary Khem, Sophannarin Khem, Harlen Hor, Soparl Ngin, Samnang Hor, Akara Im, Andeth Vann, Phousita Serey Huy, Chenda Ty, Sarith Heng, Sokhoeum Sim, Maliny Pen, Maliny Khem, Elizabeth Yim, Choumnith Sath.

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The Fishing Dance

There is a saying in Cambodia "Where there is water, there are fish." The Fishing Dance demonstrates two of the traditional methods of catching fish, using bamboo baskets, called chhneang, and angrut, which are braided bell-shaped traps for catching larger fish in shallow water.

Love and romance are favorite themes in folk dances. In traditional Cambodian society, young people are carefully watched and don't have many opportunities to get to know one another. But the fishing quarter is one place they had the chance to meet. The Fishing Dance shows how young people balance custom and courtship by the river's edge.

Angkor Dance Troupe

thank you for sharing the beauty of your culture!

Nina Coppens, PhD, RN

**Director of the Baccalaureate Nursing Program
University of Massachusetts Lowell**

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Tbal Kdoeung

Tbal Kdoeung comes from the northern part of Cambodia. It demonstrates how Khmer farmers process rice after it has been brought in from the fields – breaking the rice chaff with wooden mallets and winnowing or separating the rice from the chaff by rotating it in flat baskets.

The Preap (White Dove) Dance

In Cambodia, the dove represents peace, as it does in many parts of the world. Preap is a dance to discourage war and the atrocities of war and to celebrate peace and harmony among all people.



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In January 1998, Troupe members performed at NewTV in Newton in a television program for deaf children. Below, visiting Masters Sophea Sek, Yom Peng, and Say Souer were interviewed for a Khmer television show in Lowell.



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The Troupe presented a spirited "Trod Dance" at the Temple for Cambodian New Year in 1998, marking the first time the traditional folk procession had ever been performed in Greater Lowell.

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The Chhay Yam

The Chhay Yam is a comic country dance. After the harvest, Khmer farmers gather in ceremonies and festivals to celebrate. The Chhay Yam is performed to enliven and add levity to these celebrations. Its exciting rhythm and lively "call and response" singing encourages the dancers to improvise their steps and gestures.

The Angkor Dance Troupe is funded in part by:

The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Community Folklife Program,
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